

University of Northern Iowa  
**UNI ScholarWorks**

---

Graduate Research Papers

Student Work

---

2005

## School counselors and character education

Jacob M. Mueller  
*University of Northern Iowa*

Copyright ©2005 Jacob M. Mueller

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Applied Ethics Commons](#), and the [Student Counseling and Personnel Services Commons](#)

*Let us know how access to this document benefits you*

---

### Recommended Citation

Mueller, Jacob M., "School counselors and character education" (2005). *Graduate Research Papers*. 1227.  
<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/1227>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uni.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uni.edu).

---

## School counselors and character education

### Abstract

Character Education can be an essential aspect of creating a respectful climate in the school setting. Tragic incidents in schools across the country have heightened the awareness of how to create positive situations for all students who attend public schools. Too often, this awareness is not followed up with action. Character Education is an opportunity for educators to step up and put actions behind their lip service. Legislation surrounding education in America today sometimes creates difficult obstacles in implementing programs to foster a positive school environment. It can be done however, and is being done.

# SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND CHARACTER EDUCATION

---

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,  
and Postsecondary Education  
University of Northern Iowa

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Education

---

by

Jacob M. Mueller

December 2005

This research paper by: Jacob M. Mueller

Entitled: SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND CHARACTER EDUCATION

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Education.

10/7/05  
Date Approved

Linda Nebbe  
[Signature]  
Adviser/Director of Research Paper

10/7/05  
Date Received

John K. Smith  
[Signature]  
Head, Department of Educational  
Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary  
Education

Character Education can be an essential aspect of creating a respectful climate in the school setting. Tragic incidents in schools across the country have heightened the awareness of how to create positive situations for all students who attend public schools. Too often, this awareness is not followed up with action.

Character Education is an opportunity for educators to step up and put actions behind their lip service. Legislation surrounding education in America today sometimes creates difficult obstacles in implementing programs to foster a positive school environment. It can be done however, and is being done.

Character Education as a concept is not new. Text books from the 1960's talk about developmental guidance. In Dinkmeyer (1968), he states that students "need to mature in their understanding, their acceptance, and their sense of responsibility regarding themselves...need to mature gradually in learning how to make choices, to plan their lives sensibly, and to solve their problems rationally and with a high sense of moral values" (p. 18). *Developing Counseling* by Donald H. Blocher (1966) includes in chapter five, a discussion of Models of Human Effectiveness and states clearly that values are "inescapable."

As the idea of Character Education was developed, in the late seventies and early eighties curriculum began to materialize. Simon's *Values Clarification* and Vernon's *Thinking, Feeling, and Behaving* were among those that provided Character Education curriculum to assist counselors in implementing Character Education. The first Character Education curriculum to be sponsored by outside interests appeared in the late eighties (Linda Nebbe, personal communication, August 3, 2005). The curriculum was called Quest, and was sponsored by the Lyons Club International. It took roughly thirty years for the Character Education the concept to emerge into Character Education the term, as it did in the early 1990's.

Character Education is a buzz word which invokes encouraging emotions for many who speak of it. School districts across the country are becoming more and more familiar with this term. Most educators across the country undoubtedly

have some recognition with the term. However, the concept of Character Education is more of an unknown. Character Education is described as any program or activity that schools employ in helping children become good people (Robinson, Jones, & Hayes, 2000). The concept of Character Education is a concept that can mean many different things to different people. Lickona (1993), one of the nation's foremost experts on Character Education, describes Character Education as being "the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of morality" (as cited in Nicholson & Pearson, 2000, p. 244). According to Lickona, "Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good" (Nicholson and Pearson, 2000, p. 244). Lickona believes schools must help children understand the core values. Commit to those core values, and act upon them in their own lives (Nicholson & Pearson, 2000).

### National Movement

In 2001 when defining his goal for education, President George W. Bush quoted Dr. Martin Luther King who said, "Intelligence plus character – that is the true goal of education" (U.S. Department of Education Office of Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs, 2003, p.1). This idea from Dr. King contains a great deal of depth and a profound sense of truth. However, this thought did not register on the national radar until much later. In 1994 President Clinton and the White House began sponsoring annual conferences on "Character Building for a Civil and Democratic Society" (Traub, 2005). As a result of these

conferences, in 1996 President Clinton gave the movement his blessing when he said, in his state of the union address, “I challenge all our schools to teach Character Education, to teach good values and good citizenship” (Traub, 2005, p. 32). The idea that character can, and should be taught in our schools began to gain momentum. The U.S. Department of Education published its Strategic Plan: 2002-2007.

The third goal of this plan aims to “to develop safe schools and strong character” (CLCC, 2004). Currently 37 states are now required either by legislative mandate or by administrative regulation to implement programs in character education (Traub, 2005).

### *Necessity for Character*

Where did this great necessity for Character Education come from? Lickona believes it is a result of years and years gone by where individualism has led to a loss of moral awareness. He states, “We’d traveled down the road of exaggerated individualism that we’d begun to travel in the 1960’s and the result was a moral unraveling” (Goode, 1999, p. 16). The “moral unraveling” Lickona speaks of can probably be debated. However, there is no question that in the world our children our growing up in today they have many obstacles that get in the way of leading a successful and educationally fulfilled life. Educators today are seeing kids in schools who show an increasing amount of lack of respect towards adults, an apathetic attitude toward school, and insistence on instant gratification. These



characteristics of today's children are shown in a 2002 study by the Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth sampled 12,000 high school students across the United States and revealed some enlightening information regarding the state of moral compass held by high school youth today. The results showed that 74% of students admitted to having cheated on an exam in the past year, 38% admitted to having stolen something from a store within the past year, and 43% believed one had to lie or cheat to get ahead in life (Britzman, 2005). Kids will be kids.

Cheating, stealing, and lying will undoubtedly always be a part of the struggle of youth development. However, if these kinds of numbers are ever accepted as being ok, we run the risk of sliding down the slope of delinquency and we will have failed our children as educators.

### *Era of Instant Gratification*

The youth of today have grown up in the McDonald's era where everything they have wanted has come quickly and easily. Things that involve persistence, dedication, and hard work are difficult to handle simply because too many of today's youth have grown up without having to endure them. Video games, instant messaging, and the internet, have replaced backyard football, pen pals, and card catalogs. It is not a condemnation of the young generation. It is simply, a fact that educators of today need to embrace change, and adapt a new educational paradigm.

*Family Structure*

Technological advancements are part of the equation as to why kids today are lacking character traits. Another component is the family structure in which many children are growing up in today. Nearly one out of five school-aged children are living in single-parent homes (Pardeck, 1996). Many single parents are doing outstanding jobs raising families by themselves. However, children of divorce when compared to children of dual-parent families, exhibit more “acting-out” behaviors such as aggression and conflict with authority (Miller, Morrison, & Ryan, 1999). Too often children, who grow up in a single-parent home, because they are often working long hours, are not able to see positive character traits modeled from their parent. Research also suggests that children from divorce are more likely to have problems at school and in relationships as they mature (DeLucia-Waak & Gerrity, 2001). When so many of today’s youth are coming from less-than-ideal family situations, it is tragic to believe we must simply teach them math, science, and history, and expect them to take that education and become positive citizens. Because children from maritally intact parents seem to be more prepared to handle the adjustments that kids go through during their development (DeLucia-Waak & Gerrity, 2001), it is important for educators to be proactive in an attempt to aid those students who grow up in a “non-traditional” family environment.

In developing an educational plan for students, it is important to learn how to become a good person, make good decisions, and have positive relationships to become better equipped to have success in life. According to Ryan (1986), the challenge of education is “not simply to make children smart, but to make them smart and good. We must help children acquire the skills, attitudes and dispositions that will help them live well and that will enable the common good to flourish” (as cited in Nicholson & Pearson, 2000, p. 233). The education provided to students today needs to be more comprehensive and all-encompassing. Simply teaching facts from textbooks will not suffice. The landscape of our culture now compels us to get more creative and innovative as we aim to educate students to be winners in life. Traits frequently cited by authors as being important to character, such as responsibility, honesty, fairness, respect, trustworthiness, caring, justice, civic virtue, kindness, empathy, self-respect, self-discipline, and courage are not registering with many of today’s youth (Nicholson & Pearson, 2000). These character traits need to be taught, developed, and trained. As Aristotle explained, “Virtue of character is a result of habituation. From this it is clear that none of the virtues of character arise in us by nature” (Milson, 2002, p. 101). Aristotle believed in the idea of developing character within an individual. Britzman (2005) states that Character Education is a proactive and purposeful approach intended to create a healthy learning environment to help each student integrate the values necessary for achievement.

*Who's Values?*

So whose values do we use to shape students? Does one district place a high significance on a certain value, and another district honor another set of values? Which values are the right ones? Based upon numerous surveys conducted by the Institute for Global Ethics, Gallup, and other sources, in the United States and elsewhere, there are five core ethical values that seem to transcend culture, race, gender, age, and socioeconomic conditions (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). These core values include compassion, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect. According to Dr. Rushworth Kidder (2003), director of the Institute for Global Ethics, "Our research shows that these five values are global and universal. They hold up in all countries, across all demographics" (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 2). Many skeptics of Character Education argue that Character Education can be too "preachy" and may place too high of value on character traits valued in Western society. The information provided by the Institute for Global Ethics provides us with core ethical values to serve as guidelines that can serve populations from all cultures (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). With almost identical results, at a conference organized by the Josephson Institute of Ethics in 1992 in Aspen, Colorado, a diverse group of educators, youth leaders, and ethicists agreed unanimously that six values were clearly central to ethical people's lives, regardless of cultural differences. These six values are often referred to the "Six Pillars of Character," and include

trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2002). Teaching character can be done right, without being slanted. These values can be used as an outline in which character education programs work towards without worrying about offending or stepping over cultural bounds. What parent wouldn't want their child to be an honest, responsible, caring, fair, respectful citizen?

### Implementation

How do we teach character? There are a number of commercial character education programs that can be purchased. Some of these are: American Promise, Character Works, Character Matters, Changing Lives, and Character Counts! Many school districts are developing their own character education programs. Since 1995 the U.S. Department of Education has been awarding grants to encourage schools to implement character education programs (Traub, 2005). As part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the new Partnership in Character Education Program was established. This program gives \$25 million annually to schools (Traub, 2005).

According to Lickona (1999), "to work, any Character Education program has to be thorough, even relentless, keeping the value of good behavior ever before the eyes of the students and on their minds" (as cited in Goode, 1999, p. 6). Character Education must be seen as the conviction that schools can, and must, consciously develop a healthy peer culture because such a culture is the central

foundation for successful learning (Traub, 2005). Staff and faculty members must buy into the Character Education in order for there to be any hope of success. It cannot be only the counselor or the five-person character committee that wants to change the climate of the school. Administrators and counselors must sell the idea of Character Education throughout the school. It is important that staff members don't believe that it is a one-year band-aid to get rid of bullying or put-downs. An ideal comprehensive Character Education program would be a collaborative effort between administrators, teachers, counselors, and parents (Nicholson & Pearson, 2000).

#### *Administrator's Role*

Role modeling is the heart and soul of a good program. Good character needs to be taught from a "do as I do" not a "do as I say" perspective (Nicholson & Pearson, 2000). This concept needs to be accepted and embraced by all educators involved in a Character Education program. Being a role model is part of the deal for every adult in the building. The administrators' role in implementing a Character Education program is to help develop a strong sense of school community and environment (Nicholson & Pearson, 2000). Some of the responsibilities the administrators must help with are school assemblies, morning announcements, and newsletters. Also, the administrator can help with recognition programs, staff development programs, and school and community projects (Nicholson & Pearson, 2000). If the administration is not willing to give

the proper support and contribute to the cause, the Character Education program will ultimately fail.

### *Teacher's Role*

Teachers must focus their efforts on how classmates relate to one another (Nicholson & Pearson, 2000). Developing classroom rules are an important aspect of a teacher's job in a Character Education program (Nicholson & Pearson, 2000).

According to Lickona (1999), "It's important when you have rules that something happens when you break them. Children then take the rules seriously," therefore discipline is a crucial part of a Character Education program (as cited in Goode, 1999, p. 17). Teachers can develop classroom activities that encourage character education by using strategies such as assigning learning partners and journal writing (Nicholson & Pearson, 2000). By assigning learning partners, teachers can use this as a tool for helping students create new friendships and also help students build self-esteem (Nicholson & Pearson, 2000). Relationships between students can serve as an essential aspect of Character Education. Author and philosopher John Dewey once wrote, "The best and the deepest moral training is that which one gets by having to enter into proper relations with others" (as cited in Gilness, 2003, p. 243). Teachers can also encourage journal writing that can be used in a variety of ways in conjunction with character education (Nicholson & Pearson, 2000). There are virtually countless ways to incorporate Character

Education into the classroom curriculum. Teachers need to be encouraged to become as creative as possible and be open to the idea that Character Education can happen every day.

### *Counselor's Role*

Counselors play a key role in implementing Character Education. School counselors serve as a consultant to other school personnel because the counselor focuses on helping students develop character traits that will enhance understanding of self and their relationships with others (Nicholson & Pearson, 2000). Through classroom guidance activities, school counselors can design activities that incorporate specific character traits (Nicholson & Pearson, 2000). These activities can come in the form of discussions, videos or stories, role playing, or service learning. Another important role school counselors play in the Character Education program is through parent education. Often counselors can be the mediator between school and home. It is important that parents understand the who, what, when, how, and why's of Character Education.

### Non-effective Character Education

Only 5% of Character Education programs take place at the high school level, while nearly 80% of programs are implemented with elementary students (Williams, Yanchar, & Jensen, 2003). There is still a lot of work to be done fitting Character Education into the high school. Many secondary education settings emphasize the accumulation of knowledge about facts and their



application (Williams, Yanchar, & Jensen, 2003). An ethical structure to support this knowledge often times is not provided to students. Unfortunately, some schools are choosing to employ a superficial brand of Character Education. An example of this can be found through a study done at a high school in a rural Northwest town in Ohio. Their Character Education Program (CEP) was implemented in response to the 1999 Columbine High School tragedy (Romanowski, 2003). This Ohio school had intentions of finding better ways to improve school environment, improve academic performance, and increase community involvement. The study was done on 144 high school students evaluating the effectiveness of CEP (Romanowski, 2003).

The CEP at this Ohio high school consisted of formal 30 minute classes called Team Time for all students on Tuesday and Thursdays (Romanowski, 2003). The school was filled with posters announcing the trait of the month, words of the week, the mission statement, and monthly character themes. Classroom walls were displayed with posters such as “the Golden Rule Rules” and “Save Sex for Marriage” (Romanowski, 2003). The intentions of school employees implementing this program were surely in the right place. However, according to Berreth and Ernst (2001), “no research suggests that posters, signs, and trinkets foster human development” (as cited in Romanowski, 2003, p. 7). This is congruent with the findings from the student survey from the Ohio high school. According to one junior, “Posters are never read. They look like things I would

see in my fifth grade class...they are not affecting anyone and if they do it is not a very big impact” (Romanowski, 2003, p. 6). Berreth and Ernst (2001) argued that the shallowness of Character Education is a concern (as cited in Romanowski, 2003). In particular, “word of the week” programs where students are exposed to a term describing a character trait. This is where the school designates a character trait such as “respect” as the word of the week. Throughout the week, there are signs displaying the meaning and the particular word is talked about frequently in the classroom during the week. Berreth and Ernst (2001) view them as superficial and overly simplistic (as cited in Romanowski, 2003). It is no surprise that students surveyed from the Northwest Ohio high school thought the curriculum they were taught was demeaning, ineffective, and simplistic (Romanowski, 2003). The majority of the students from this study thought that the way the program was implemented catered toward elementary school kids and felt they were being “taught down” to (Romanowski, 2003). One sophomore stated, “By high school we already have our minds made up on what we are going to be like regardless of what teachers say” (Romanowski, 2003, p. 5).

Kohn (1997) argues that many of the strategies used in programs such as the CEP used by this school are limited to simple memory level thinking skills with minimum instructional time spent on developing a better understanding of character traits. He states:

The great majority of Character Education programs consist largely of exhortation and directed recitation. The leading providers of curriculum materials walk teachers through highly structured lessons in which character related concepts are describe and then students are drilled until they can produce the right answers. (Kohn, 1997, p. 158)

The high school in Northwest Ohio, according to its students, is guilty of this practice. According to a sophomore surveyed at the school:

The worksheets are kind of a drag. They are teaching us how to be nice to people so they give us a word search. You don't learn how to be nice to people by doing a word search. Some of this stuff is just ineffective...a lot of true and false stuff. I don't think you can teach character with busy work. It just doesn't work. (Romanoswki, 2003, p. 6)

It is important, when implementing a Character Education program, not to do something "just to do it." According to Williams, Yanchar, and Jensen (2003), real learning must be an active process, and we learn by doing. Real learning occurs more consistently and frequently when the student is dealing with real objects, real problems, real situations, rather than contrived problems. Kohn (1996) agreed with this thought, he concluded that narrowly focused programs are extrinsic, have a "fix-the-kids" orientation, and emphasize distinctly conservative values (Robinson, Jones, & Hayes, 2000).

Most studies on Character Education have not been rigorous enough to offer any definitive results (Traub, 2005). Character is a difficult quality to measure. As a result, Character Education is also hard to measure. It is an abstract concept that is often subject to opinion. We have no way to observe character directly. Much of the scientific research offered in the defense of Character Education covers short periods, two or three years (Milson, 2002). Character is often thought to be an enduring feature of a person that lasts over time. Davis (2003), suggests that possibly the only way to truly measure character would be to have a miniature social scientist perched on the shoulder of a former student day and night, year after year. Because we cannot do that, we must focus on what information is available, and embrace what has and hasn't been found to work effectively.

### Successful Character Education

Although the depth of the research surrounding Character Education is not too extensive, there have been studies done that suggests Character Education can work. Torrey Hill Middle School, in Lake Fenton, Michigan implemented the Changing Lives Character Education program (Changing Lives Leader, 2004). One year after implementing the program school officials reported a 45% decrease in disrespect issues, 50% decline in fighting, and 27% decline in detentions (Changing Lives Leader, 2004). There was an independent study done by Drs. Ronald Katsuyama and Charles Kimble, researchers in the Psychology

Department at the University of Dayton done to determine the effectiveness of the Changing Lives Character Curriculum. The study involved more than 50 schools in Ohio where Character Education programs have been implemented. The programs at the various schools differed in specifics; each had the main components of the Changing Lives program. The schools reported increased motivation for schoolwork, improvement in their school's learning environment, and improved social relationships with other students (Changing Lives Leader, 2004). Students surveyed in this study stated that they now had fewer disruptive, aggressive behaviors; more caring, pro-social behaviors; better citizenship; and more support from their teachers (Changing Lives Leader, 2004).

One of the largest studies was done by researchers at South Dakota University which included 8,419 students in schools that have adopted Character Counts! (Traub, 2005). The study concluded that between 1998 and 2000 the number of students who reported various acts of cheating, stealing, drinking, drug taking, class cutting, and other assorted disruptive behaviors decreased significantly (Traub, 2005). Character Education programs can make a difference in changing the climate of a school. When a positive school climate is provided, students are more likely to do well in desired academic areas. In the era of standardized tests, "non-educational" programs such as Character Education can be a tough sell. This outlook needs to change. In a study done by researchers from the *Journal of Character Education* conducted on California schools that described themselves

as having substantial Character Education programs, they concluded that performance on standardized tests from 1999 to 2002 was “significantly positively correlated” with “a school’s ability to ensure a clean and safe environment” (Traub, 2005, p. 34).

### *Classroom Character Education*

Jane Gilness is a high school language arts teacher who “gets” Character Education (Gilness, 2003). Gilness invokes Character Education into her Honors English 10 class at any opportunity she gets. She honored the concept of community through exploring the use of eulogies (Gilness, 2003). Her students thought they were learning about prefixes and roots. Most of the students in the class had a pretty good understanding for what a eulogy was. Mrs. Gilness’s class decided eulogies are nice words and kind thoughts about dead people given by friends and family members (Gilness, 2003). Gilness instructed her students to look up the prefix (eu) and the root (logy). She then asked them to define them. Her class came to the conclusion that “eulogy” means to “speak well.” Once the students had reflected on the meaning of the word, Gilness asked the students why we wait until our loved ones can no longer hear us before we say something nice to them. Gilness then explained to her class that she was fairly new to the district, and she hadn’t gotten to know her students all that well yet. Gilness then asked her students to give eulogies for one another so she could get a sense of who they were (2003). The students ended up loving the idea (Gilness, 2003). They put a

great amount of thought and planning into the assignment. According to Gilness (2003), there was a stronger sense of community and camaraderie among the students. They just thought it was a vocabulary lesson the whole time. This is an ideal example of how Character Education can be infused into everyday curriculum in away that is exciting and thought provoking.

Simple every day activities and routines, if used creatively, can be used to help develop character in students. Martinson (2003) provides an example of how he used an ethical dilemma he witnessed personally while getting food at Wendy's to create a healthy classroom discussion:

I was somewhat taken back once when I found myself at Wendy's directly in line behind a very well dressed, almost distinguished looking, couple. The husband grew quite agitated as he asserted that the young man behind the counter was putting too much ice in his soft drink. He nearly leaped over the counter, demanding that some of the ice be removed. In addition to the soft drink, he ordered a hamburger, and his wife ordered the "all you can eat" salad bar.

Because my order was filled faster, I already was sitting when the wife proceeded to the salad bar. My attention—or ethical imagination had been aroused, and I watched her as she loaded—(and loaded and loaded) her plate. I knew what was going to

happen. She sat down at the table with her husband. He opened the wrapper on his hamburger and moved it next to her plate. She took her fork and gave him half the salad from her plate. At the same moment that the husband was expressing outrage about too much ice in his soft drink, he and his wife were conspiring to steal salad! (Martinson, 2003, p. 16-17)

Students can recognize that stealing food from Wendy's is an ethical issue. Some of Martinson's students suggested there might be reasons to excuse this couple's behavior. The students then discussed what it means to be ethical (Martinson, 2003). His students posed the questions: Would it be stealing if the wife could not eat all she had taken? What if the husband shared half of his hamburger with his wife? By these intriguing questions, it is evident that the ethical dilemma posed by Martinson stimulated his student's moral imagination. This type of intuitive conversation leads students to ponder the right and the wrong, the good and the bad. Even the most creative word of the week poster above every drinking fountain in the building couldn't match the kind of growth that could spawn from a conversation like the Wendy's dilemma. According to Weiner (1995), "we...cannot teach character by picking a value of the month and advertising it" (as cited in Martinson, 2003, p. 17). If we hope to teach ethical decision making to young people, we must fuel their moral imaginations so they



recognize there are better and worse ways to respond to particular situations (Weiner, 1995, as cited in Martinson, 2003).

In Hayes & Hagedorn (2000), they claim that one assumption made by educators in general is that many students are not receiving instructions from home concerning respect, responsibility, honesty, truthfulness, caring, citizenship, and other desirable character traits. Bryan (2005) ponders this question. Is it possible that many youngsters suffer from a moral illiteracy? The use of children's literature has been well-established as a resource for teaching all academic areas of a character curriculum (Bryan, 2005). This idea has started to become a popular avenue to teach character traits to younger students. Bryan (2005) suggests that quality children's literature is "woven with strands of ethical concepts and democratic principles" (p.5). It is proposed that these tales often leave children better off ethically than they were before they heard or read them, and they also give children a more acceptable picture of human understanding (Bryan, 2005). Grimm fairy tales such as "The Frog Prince," "Rumpelstiltskin," and "Rupenzel" and nearly every one of the Grimm brothers' tales, good and evil exist at the same time, and evil is not without its attractions (Bryan, 2005). Grimm fairy tales are stories children are captivated by while at the same time, they allude to the virtues of kindness, sweetness, love, courage, endurance, obedience, caring, consideration and loyalty (Bryan, 2005).

### Counselor Considerations

Because children today are lacking a significant amount of character development, school counselors are taking on a large burden of this insufficiency. School counselors are too often confronted with the by-product of disrespectful, irresponsible, and uncaring student attitudes and behaviors (Britzman, 2005). So it would only seem expected that school counselors take a leading role in developing a Character Education program within their school. In Williams (2000), it states that character education is, “the fastest growing reform movement in p-12 education today” (as cited in Halbur & Vess, p 32). If that is true, it is imperative that school counselors start getting active and educate themselves on how Character Education will best fit their students. The American School Counselor Association (1998) supports Character Education in the schools, stating that professional school counselors need to “take an active role in initiating, facilitating, and promoting character education programs in the school curriculum” (as cited in Halbur & Vess, 2003).

### *Suggestions*

There are a few things counselors must take into consideration when trying to implement an effective Character Education program: the curriculum must be relative and interesting to the students, popular culture can be an effective tool, character education must be taught at appropriate levels with appropriate teaching strategies, and character traits should be integrated into the existing curriculum

(Romanowski, 2003). A popular criticism of Character Education is that it is too basic and is unrealistic. Counselors who implement Character Education need to be creative and be in touch with the culture in which the students are living in. Romanowski (2003) discussed how one teacher showed a segment of *The Simpsons* and analyzed Bart's disrespectful behavior toward his parents, peers, and others. The class discussion pointed out the negative aspects of disrespect, how others view disrespectful individuals, and why Bart's behavior was inappropriate (Romanowski, 2003). This is an ideal example of how to be both creative and relative. Along with being relative and interesting, Character Education must be taught at appropriate levels. High school and middle school Character Education programs must provide a more mature approach to character education by providing opportunities for students to engage in discussion of relevant and complicated character traits and dilemmas (Romanowski, 2003). Lastly, Williams (1993) argues that students believe that teaching morals fails if, "teachers try to make it a big deal or have a separate class" (as cited in Romanowski, 2003, p.22). Educators need to be a little subtle at times to really impact the character development of students.

### Conclusion

Opponents of Character Education believe the movement is filled with superficial and surface-level content. There is no doubt this exists at some schools. Examples of unproductive implementation of Character education

should not serve to define the initiative (Milson, 2002). Character Education should be meaningful and thought provoking. Character Education should provide an avenue for students to build and strengthen relationships with each other. In supporting the development of students we cannot just rely on the facts and information they are provided with in the core classes. When talking about the effectiveness of the Changing Lives Character Education Program, Larry Bengston, of Lighthouse Counseling, states in the Changing Lives Leader (2004), "Our society preaches performance in the classroom, on the playing field, and in life in general. What students really need is to know there is someone who cares about them. Changing Lives provides an avenue for adults to show youth they care. It takes the emphasis off performance and focuses on relationships" (p. 13).

The aim of Character Education, ultimately, is to change attitudes, and to have students to have positive outlook on the world. There are ample examples of individuals who had high IQ's, but low character, and eventually succumbed to failure. A good Character Education program can help in changing attitudes. There was study a done by researchers at Harvard comparing attitude and skills/knowledge in why a person gets a job, keeps a job or moves up in a job (CLCC, 2004). They found that 85% of the reason a person gets a job, keeps a job or moves up in a job is based on his or her attitude. Only 15% is based on his or her technical skills and knowledge. Why do we spend so much time making sure our students score well on tests? In the long run their attitude and the kind of

person they are will determine their success in life. As Theodore Roosevelt once stated, “To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society” (Gilness, 2003, p. 243).

## References

- American School Counseling Association (1998). American School Counseling Association's position statement on Character Education. Retrieved December 10,2002, from <http://schoolcounselor.org/content.cfm?L1=1000&L2=7>.
- Berreth, D.G., & Ernst, D. (2001). Character education: A common goal. *ASCD Infobrief*, Issue 25. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Blocher, D. (1966). *Developmental Counseling*. The Ronald Press Company, New York.
- Britzman, M. (2005). Improving our moral landscape via character education: An opportunity for school counselor leadership. *Professional School Counseling*, 8, no 3, 293-295.
- Bryan, L. (2005). Once upon a time: A Grimm approach to character education. *Journal of Social Studies Research*, 1, 3-6.
- Changing Lives Character Curriculum, (2004). *Changing Lives Leader*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Changing Lives Character Curriculum. *Why Character Education?* Retrieved from [www.mark1.org/changinglives](http://www.mark1.org/changinglives) on 3/20/05.

Character and citizenship: Are schools safe without them? , (2003). *U.S.*

*Department of Education of safe and drug-free schools.* Retrieved from [www.cetac.org](http://www.cetac.org) on 4/21/05.

David D. Williams, Stephen C. Yanchar, and Larry Jensen. *Journal of Moral Education*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2003.

Davis, M. (2003). What's wrong with character education? *American Journal of Education*, 110, 32-58.

DeLucia-Waak, J., & Gerrity, D. (2001). Effective group work for elementary school-age children whose parents are divorcing. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 9, 273-284.

Dinkmeyer, D.C. (1968). *Guidance and counseling in the elementary school.* Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc. New York.

Gilness, J. (2003). Classroom practice: How to integrate character education into the school. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 3, 243-247.

Goode, S. (1999). The education of good character. *Insight on the News*. 5, 16-17.

Halbur, D. & Vess, K. (2003). Character education: What counselor educators need to know. *ERIC/CASS Digest*.

Hayes, B.G. & Hagedorn, W. B. (2000). A case for character education. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education & Development*, 1, 2-4

- Hayes, G. , Jones, D. , & E. Robinson. (2000). Humanistic education to character education: An ideological journey. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, 39, no 1, 21-25.
- Helping your child become a responsible citizen. (2003). *U.S. Department of Education Office of Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs*. Retrieved from. [www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/hyc.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/hyc.html) on 4/21/05.
- Howe, L, Kirschenbaum, H., & Simon, S. (1972). *Values clarification: A handbook of practical strategies for teachers and students*. New York, NY: Hart Publishing Co.
- Josephson Institute of Ethics. (2002). Report card 2002: The ethics of American youth. Marina del Rey, CA: Author.
- Kohn, A. (1996). *Beyond discipline: From compliance to community*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Martinson, D. (2003). High school students and character education it all starts at Wendy's. *The Clearing House*, 1, 14-18.
- Miller, P., Morrison, W., & Ryan, P. (1999). Practical strategies for helping children of divorce in today's classroom. *Childhood Education*, 75, 285-290.
- Milson, A. (2002). Developing a comprehensive approach to character education in the social studies. *The Social Studies*. 3, 101-102.



- Nicholson, J. & Pearson, Q. (2000). Comprehensive Character Education in the elementary school: Strategies for administrators, teachers, and counselors. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, 38, no 4, 243-251.
- Pardeck, John. (1996). Recommended books for helping children deal with separation and divorce. *Adolescence*, 31, 233-235.
- Traub, J. (2005). The moral imperative: character education, soul by soul, at the Hyde schools. *Education Next*. V5, 22-34.
- Romanowski, M. (2003). Through the eyes of the students: High school students' perspectives on character education. *American Secondary Education*, 1, 3-20.
- Vernon, A. (1989). *Thinking, feeling, behaving: An emotional education curriculum for children*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.
- Williams, M. (2000). Models of character education: Perspectives and developmental issues. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, 39, pp. 32-40.
- Williams, M. M. (1993). Actions speak louder than words: What students think. *Educational Leadership*, 51 (3), 22-23.